

From retail to runway, Lee Harper shapes future of tableware with Plane Talking Products



Lee Harper as Product Specialist, Tableware for Plane Talking Products

Plane Talking Products ([PTP](#)) announced the appointment of [Lee Harper](#) as Product Specialist, Tableware at the end of January. Within the week, *PAX International* was invited to sit down with Harper to discuss all things that led him to the world of aviation.

When Harper talks about tableware, he does not start with plates or glazes. He starts with responsibility. After more than three decades at British retailer Marks & Spencer ([M&S](#)), he is used to thinking like someone whose job it is to protect experience, quality and trust at scale. Now in his role with PTP, that same mindset is applied in the air.

“The principles are very similar. Just as I was a custodian of the M&S brand, PTP plays that role for the airlines we work with. At M&S, we continually innovated to reflect emerging design and hospitality trends — airlines expect the same,” Harper says. “At PTP, my focus is on helping create memorable ‘surprise and delight’ moments through the onboard dining experience.”

Harper admits the airline sector struck him immediately for its intensity. Not just the size of programs, but the precision it demands. Where retail allows room to test and refine, inflight service leaves little margin for error.

“My role is to ensure we fully understand production timelines, technical constraints and risks so we can deliver complex, multicomponent programs with complete accuracy,” he says. “Having spent much of my career in manufacturing, I understand how to build and manage a reliable supply chain that delivers on time, in full, and to specification.”

That manufacturing fluency sits at the heart of how PTP approaches tableware as interconnected systems of materials, production processes and logistics, all under pressure to perform flawlessly at scale. It is also where sustainability enters the conversation.

“There is considerable progress across production facilities, including transitions to renewable energy, the introduction of electric kilns and increased automation. Many materials now originate from post-consumer waste, and plant-based single-use options are expanding,” he says.

For Harper, one of the most significant levers is also one of the least visible to passengers: weight. In premium cabins especially, tableware can carry a perception of heft and luxury, yet every gram has an impact once multiplied across fleets and flight schedules.

“At PTP we are highly focused on weight reduction in premium tableware. Even small weight savings, when scaled, can meaningfully reduce fuel consumption — probably our largest sustainability opportunity,” he says. “Understanding how any of these developments influence a product’s carbon footprint is essential. We help airlines assess this impact and identify changes that deliver the greatest environmental benefit.”

At the same time, Harper’s brief is far from purely technical. His immediate focus includes developing a new product range and translating broader hospitality and retail trends into forms that can survive the rigors of inflight use. Color is returning to ceramics, multifunctional pieces are supporting more relaxed dining styles, and advances in glass production are opening new decorative possibilities. All filtered through the durability, weight and operational constraints of inflight service. New concepts will be showcased on Stand 4C70 at WTCE this year.

Across development runs a common thread: balancing experience with execution. Harper’s role sits at that intersection, where trend awareness meets manufacturing discipline and where design decisions ripple outward into supply chains, fuel burn and brand perception. For airlines, tableware might be one component of the onboard offer, but in the hands of someone who has spent a career shaping how products feel, perform and represent a brand, it is a powerful part of the journey.